2:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
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[The Cannibal Dance]



The most feared of all Cannibals are those who have the unusual prerogative of eating corpses. At present (1922), there is only one man with this right, whereas at least seven can bite the living. His prerogative was recently obtained from the people of Rivers' Inlet, although the ritualistic devouring of corpses was well known to the Bella Coola in former days. All informants agreed, however, that the actual eating of a body was practically unknown.[1] Even when one was provided and the Cannibal dragged it from house to house, accompanied by an escort of *kukusiut*, though he sank his teeth into the flesh and pulled forth morsels of the carcass, he invariably disposed of them as soon as he was out of sight of the uninitiated, as in the case of the dog. Of course, blood and small pieces of flesh must have been swallowed inadvertently, but the rite was always essentially ritualistic, not real. More often, the "corpse" consisted of a wooden frame-work, shaped like a human body, and covered with the scraped skins of deer or dogs. The interior was filled with the flesh of an animal, and the whole buried in the graveyard until the meat had become foul. The uninitiated, from a distance, watched the exhuming of this object and concluded that it really was a long-buried body. Fear prevented them from making a close inspection, so that the defects of the imitation were not apparent. The frames were kept hidden from year to year; an inquisitive non-member who chanced to stumble upon one would have to be initiated or die.

On account of the long time that has elapsed since a complete corpse-eating Cannibal dance was carried out, it was found impossible to obtain a detailed account of the ritual. This deficiency is unimportant since all informants agreed that it closely resembled other Cannibal dances.

Like other Cannibals, one who has the prerogative of eating dead human flesh can perform as often as he desires, subject only to the approval of the marshals, who have no hesitation

[1] Apart from this ceremonial eating, no trace of cannibalism was found among the Bella Coola.

6:Boas E-5 (1886-ca. 1890)1892
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her the secrets of the Kū'siôt. She wore ornaments of red cedar-bark around her head, wrists, and ankles; her face was blackened, her hair strewn with eagle-down. She commanded the woman to dance in the same way as she saw her dancing. The people should accompany her dance with songs, and, after she had finished, they should dance with masks. She said, 'Whenever a person sees me your people shall dance the Kū'siôt. If you do not do so I shall punish you with death and sickness. In summer, while I am in my house, you must not dance the Kū'siôt.'

Ever since that time the Bilqula dance the Kū'siôt. When a man has seen Anaûlikôtsai'x sitting before her cave he will invite the people to a Kū'siôt. A ring made of red and white cedar-bark is hung up in his house, and the uninitiated are not allowed to enter it. Only in the evening, when dances are performed, they may look on, standing close to the door. As soon as the dances are over they must retire from the taboo house. Each Kū'siôt lasts three days.

The various dances performed by members of the Kū'siôt are also the property of the gentes, and the right of performing them is restricted to members of the gens. They must not be given to a daughter's husband, as is the case with the Sisaû'kʜ dances (see above), but belong to the members of the gens alone. They may, however, be loaned and borrowed by members of the gens, who have a right to a particular dance, but who do not own it. Permission to use a mask or dance is obtained from the owner by payments. The owner may reclaim the dance or the borrower may return it at any time. Membership of the Kū'siôt is obtained through an initiation. At this time the novice is given his Kū'siôt name, which he retains throughout life. Each gens has its peculiar Kū'siôt names, which are inherited by young persons from their parents or from other relatives. Thus a young man who had the name of Pō'pō until he was about seventeen years old obtained at his initiation the name of Tl'akō'otl. I have not reached a very clear understanding of the details of the initiation; it seems that the dance is simply given to the novice in the same way as the Sisaû'kʜ, this initiation being connected with a potlatch. But still it seems possible that he must 'dream' of the dance which he is to perform. Only the highest degrees of the Kū'siôt have to pass through a religious ceremony of some importance. The highest degrees are the xlaqō'tla (the Hā'mats'a of the Kwakiutl), the O'laq (the Nō'tlmatl of the Kwakiutl), and the Dā'tla (the Nō'ntaistatl of the Hā'iltsuk). These grades are also hereditary. A Kū'siôt novice may acquire them at once at his first initiation.

When the xlaqō'tla is initiated he goes into the forest, where he encounters his guardian spirit. It is believed that he goes up to the sun, and formerly he had to take human flesh along for food. The chiefs hold a council the night preceding the beginning of the ceremonies, and anyone who wanted to show his liberality offered one of his slaves to be killed, in order to serve as food for the xlaqō'tla. The offer was accepted and a payment of from ten to twenty blankets made for the slave. The latter was killed, and the members of the xlaqō'tla order devoured one-half of the body before the departure of the novice to the woods. There the latter is tied up and left to fast. He may stay there for twenty or thirty days until the spirit appears to him and takes him up to the sun, where he is initiated. Early one morning he returns, and is heard outside the houses. He has lost all his hair, which, it is believed, has been torn

575 them. Let the chief give them red cedar-bark." The people take small
796 pieces of blankets, and sew red cedar-bark on to them in designs corresponding to the paintings on the faces of these deities, and they give these to the deities in order to appease them. Then they throw grease into the fire. During all this time E'xtem stands in the rear of the house; and when a painting has been finished, the man who offers it to the deity shouts, "Xemxemxult'ō'n.ls t'aix'ma'!" ("This is Xemxemxult'ō'n.ls.") And E'xtem sings, "Yayk'lamcts'tk'a wa k'wax.tsnal'x.ut, t'aix' tal'ya: at.l'ax.'ō'mmxxmx nmk'mixtmxal'x mxlkxlxtxtx'ya." As soon as he has finished his song, a loud noise is heard on the roof, as though a heavy stone were falling down. E'xtem arises and performs a dance, while the noise of whistles is heard proceeding from him.

575 I am not familiar with the details of the ceremonial, and shall proceed to record the principal characteristics of the various societies. The Cannibal is initiated in the House of Myths by Ba'xaox.ls. I recorded above (p. 34) how a young man was initiated by this spirit, and how he was returned to his friends. The return of the Cannibal is accompanied by ceremonies similar [184] to those recorded in this tradition. It seems that the ceremonies of the Cannibals of various families are much alike, each having a tradition of its own referring to the initiation. It is believed that all the Cannibals, during their initiation, go up to the sky. I was told that on this journey they have to take human flesh along for food. It is said that in former times the chiefs held a council the night preceding the beginning of the ceremonies, and any one who wanted to show his liberality offered one of his slaves to be killed in order to serve as food for Ba'xaox.ls. The offer was accepted, and a payment made for the slave. The latter was killed, and the members of the [246] Ba'xaox.ls order devoured one-half of the body before the departure of the novice to the woods.

The spirit appears to the novice while he is in the woods, and takes him up to the House of Myths, where he is initiated. Early one morning he returns, and is heard outside of the houses. He has lost all his hair except a little in the median line of the head. It is believed that it has been torn off by the strong wind blowing in the higher regions. Some Cannibals do not devour human flesh, but tear dogs to pieces or devour raw salmon. The 575 ceremonial consists in pacifying the Cannibal, and exorcising the spirit that 796 possesses him. This is the object of the ka'xixt ceremonial. After a Cannibal has returned, the people try to capture him. When he is first heard to approach, the speaker, whose face is painted black, and who wears a cedar-bark ring, and is covered with eagle-down, shouts, "Tix'ma'n'an tak'xxtx'l.ix, tax.'al'on'al. P'alx'extxlxtxtxnal' tix'ma'n'an tsxiswalx'l.ix. t'ax.'aixtxt'a!" ("Arise, it may be our Cannibal. Awake!") The Cannibal is accompanied by four assistants, who are called Alilpa, and who from time to time utter

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woman to dance in the same way as she saw her dancing. The people should accompany her dance with songs, and, after she had finished, they should dance with masks. She said, "Whenever a person sees me, your people shall dance the hâ'ɛmat. If you do not do so, I shall punish you with death and sickness. In summer, while I am in my house, you must not dance the hâ'ɛmat." 575 773 776 535

Ever since that time the Bi'lxula dance the hâ'ɛmat. When a man has seen Anaêlkuia'ɛi'x· sitting in front of her cave, he will invite the people to a hâ'ɛmat. A ring made of red and white cedar bark is hung up in his house, and the uninitiated are not allowed to enter it. Only in the evening, when dances are performed, they may look on, standing close to the door. As soon as the dances are over, they must retire from the taboo house. Each hâ'ɛmat lasts three days. 575 776 535

The various dances performed by members of the hâ'ɛmat are also property of the clans, and the right to perform them is restricted to members of the clan. They must not be given to a daughter's husband, as is the case with the sisaû'k· dances, but belong to the members of the clan, who have a right to a particular dance, but who do not own it. Permission to use a mask or dance is obtained from the owner by payments. The owner may reclaim the dance or the borrower may return it at any time. Membership of the hâ'ɛmat is obtained through an initiation. At this time the novice is given his hâ'ɛmat name, which is inherited by young persons from their parents or from other relatives. Thus a young man who had the name of Pa'pɛ until he was about seventeen years old, obtained at his initiation the name of L'nkâ'ɛt. I have not reached a very clear understanding of the details of the initiation; it seems that the dance is simply given to the novice in the same way as the sisaû'k·, this initiation being connected with a potlatch. But still it seems possible that he must "dream" of the dance which he is to perform. Only the highest degrees of the hâ'ɛmat have to pass through a religious ceremony of some importance. The highest degrees are the xlaxô'la (the hâ'mata'a of the Kwakiutl), the ô'lɛx (the nô'lmat. of the Kwakiutl), and the dâ'lia (the nô'ntaistalat. of the Kwakiutl). These grades are also hereditary. A hâ'ɛmat novice may acquire them at once at his first initiation. 575 535 575 614 575 [426] [551] [428] [556] [171] [554]

When the xlaxô'la is initiated, he goes into the forest, where he encounters his guardian spirit. It is believed that he goes up to the sun, and formerly he had to take human flesh along for food. The chiefs held a council the night preceding the beginning of the ceremonies, and anyone who wanted to show his liberality offered one of his slaves to be killed in order to serve as food for the xlaxô'la. The offer was accepted, and a payment of from ten to twenty blankets was made for the slave. The latter was killed, and the members of the xlaxô'la order devoured one-half of the body before the departure of the novice to the woods. There the latter was tied up and left to fast. He may stay there for twenty or thirty days until the spirit appears 575 785 787 [246]

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to him and takes him up to the sun, where he is initiated. Early one morning he returns, and is heard outside the houses. He has lost all his hair, which, it is believed, has been torn out by the strong breeze blowing in the higher regions. He is quite naked, and bites everyone whom he can lay hold of. If he can not catch anyone he will bite his own arm. It is believed that he has lost his soul, which fled from the body when the spirit came to him. Therefore the shamans must try for four days to recapture his soul. The night after they have recovered it the nłaxō'ła dances, clothed in a bearskin and wearing a large head ring, heavy bracelets and anklets, all made of red cedar bark. Sometimes he appears wearing the mask of the Hā'ıpsta (fig. 308), the spirit which initiated him. This mask corresponds exactly to that of BaxbakualanuXsī'wae of the Kwakiutl. Some nłaxō'ła do not bite people, but merely devour raw salmon or tear dogs to pieces and devour them. Those who bite people will also devour corpses. The nłaxō'ła has to observe a number of regulations. For four years after his initiation he must not gamble. He must stay away from his wife for one year, but this period is being reduced to one month. For two or three months he must not leave his house.

Fig. 308.
MASK OF THE nłaxō'ła DANCE.
Hā'ıpsta.
Cat. No. 153101, U. S. N. M.
Collected by C. Boas.

The ō'lex (the laugher) and the dā'ła (the thrower) do not go into the woods to be initiated, but both must fast three days before their first dance. The ō'lex "makes fun of everything" and scratches people with his nails. The dā'ła carries stones and sticks and breaks household goods and canoes. If he has destroyed some object during the day, he pays for it at night when he dances. The ō'lex and the dā'ła, after they have danced, must stay in their houses for one month.

If a person transgresses the laws of the kō'sint, for instance, when the nłaxō'ła gambles, or when a man performs a dance to which he has no right, also when a person derides the ceremonies or makes a mistake in dancing, his punishment is death. The chiefs assemble in council and the offender is called before the court. After his offense has been proved, he is asked whether he is willing to suffer the penalty of death. If he is not willing and one of his relatives is found willing to take the penalty on himself, the guilty party is spared and the substitute killed in his stead. The execution of the judgment is intrusted to the shaman, who bewitches the condemned person by throwing disease into him or by poisoning him in some other (supernatural?) way. The object thrown by the shaman is a shell, bone, or finger nail, around